

Dear Dave,

7/12/91

In annotating Beschloss' The Crisis I ears for you after reading continuously I decided that because you might be here before I finished it I'd skip and do what seemed likely to be the more important chapters first. Skipping back now, when I came to 188 I was impressed by what became apparent: there is absolutely nothing at all about which Beschloss has any scruple in misleading and misinforming the reader, if not also intending this for history, and nothing to ~~ashonest~~ dishonest for him to use against JFK. At this point it is an exaggerated account of his Addison's disease and his back pain. With a few slurs against FDR, too.

There is no basis for B's conjecture that had the voters known the truth about his Addison's he'd not have been elected. FDR was known to all as a hopeless physical cripple but he was elected in an unprecedented landslide. On FDR, what B says about Yalta is a deliberate lie. He was tired. We all knew overly tired. I did not suspect worse, perhaps others did. But Yalta was a very good agreement for the US. Only the ideologues of the right extreme said and say otherwise. Their interest then, with the war against Hitler still not yet over, was the Cold War, as it was later. They did not want peace with the USSR or for it have secure borders. They also did not want to face political and military realities. FDR functioned magnificently through the fatigue until he died and cripple that he was he drew the country together, gave it hope, and started programs that helped the average person, the poor in particular.

Now on this utter nonsense about JFK's alleged physical and mental limitations, it is 100% false, as ^{JFK's} his record leaves without doubt. From the vigor of his life and Presidential functioning to the autopsy report, of a well-muscled man. Even with the relatively sedentary life of the man who must spend so much time sitting at a desk and in conferences.

Note that B does not compare his functioning, his mental processes, with Reagan's.

It happens that last night my friend Sol remarked that he is impressed by my output.

It also happens that what he referred to was when I was even more handicapped, in even more pain, and I'm much older than JFK and have and have had more serious illnesses than he had. By the way, I spent much of yesterday with two younger people, Chip Selby and his brother. They know the JFK material well. They came here for help on what I regard as a very worthwhile project, and while we were together, despite considerable pain and difficulty moving I was able to indicate to them much that had not dawned on them. Just the day before, after more than two weeks of additional pain, yesterday's more acute because of a bad step I took in walking, I learned that I have degeneration of the disks of the lower back and arthritis in the left foot, of the more damaged leg. Not only could this news reasonable be considered so personally worrisome it could have interfered with my ability to think, I also had in the back of my mind that none of the medications can be used on me, contraindicated over the anticoagulant. But it in no way diminished my capability to help Chip. Pain to one adjusted to it need not interfere with thinking. There is no reason to believe that with JFK it did in any way.

I illustrate with when I was about JFK's age. I hurt my lower back in 1939. For a long period of time I could get out of bed only when Lil put her legs against my back and pushed me off onto the floor. She cried, it did hurt me, and it sometimes took me quite some time to get onto my feet. But I did. And it in those days was no real impediment to the functioning of my mind.

When I farmed with this lower back trouble that not infrequently prevented my standing erect, as is true this morning, I cleared much of our land that had not been farmed since the late 1890s-by hand, without any equipment or tractor.

I bought a 20' shack in Frederik for \$20, had ~~it~~ it delivered when the bulldozer that was to excavate the basement of the house we built was to be returned for. It was on pine logs longer than 20 feet, and I carried them on my shoulder steeply uphill and then for about 5' up the slope of the bank along the road close to 45 degrees, put them on my truck, and they sawed into so much lumber they made more than the entire upper and lower plates of a 40" building. With this bad back?

There were times when I was in agony and not only had to tend the hickens but had to make my deliveries. Once or twice I got a neighbor's boy to jump up onto the truck to fetch what I needed, after which I delivered it. But by the time the morning was over I didn't need him.

Time to walk. I make two additional points relating to the evil or what B here does. One of that adapting to physical adversity and pain helps in many ways, including I think reducing reaction to fear. Next, how could JFK's back trouble been a crippling problem with the sex life B and others attribute to him?

There is much that can be learned from having to adjust to live with pain. One thing is to adapt and to accept having to adapt. Another is having to think ahead, to anticipate what lies ahead. While this is far from all, what I am suggesting is that rather than being the liability B. suggests JFK's medical and physical problems could have been an asset to him as President, as B never considers.

Because this precedes Vienna, leads into it, I suppose it is possible that B. intends it as an argument that JFK did not do as well as he could have in Vienna. I did come to a place I marked for your attention in which B reports that what his trusted aides pressed upon him was his need to be aggressive. That course was bound to fail and to be counterproductive but I doubt B says this. He seems to me to be laying the foundation for alleging incompetence of one kind or another to JFK.

I add that having to function with pain requires and teaches perseverance and determination and lead to the ability to do the seemingly impossible. Not typical but when we farmed there were times I had to store feed in 100lb sacks at the top of a steep hill and more than 150 feet from the closest chicken house. When I could not use my back and in deep snows, using crutches to be able to walk, I regularly got sacks on my shoulder, carried them to the buildings, put the feed out, and never once slipped or fell. It did hurt! But by having to do it I found ways of doing it. H